among the other ministers. The rich and important cantons were entrusted to the Kamsaogo Naba, chief eunuch. This was because the emperor wanted to be sure that he would recover the fortune left by this minister at his death. Since the latter was merely the guardian of the king's wives, he had no legitimate heirs. The eunuch appointed to replace him had to establish his own personal fortunes. Only the horses or women which the late minister might have given [49] during his lifetime to persons in his section were left with their owners. [Ed., Mossi villages are divided into sections (Fr., quartier), which are really hamlets containing several households or compounds. These sections are indigenous, not colonial subdivisions.]

Powers of the Ministers over the Vassal Chiefs of the Mogho Naba

It would be a mistake to think that before the French occupation the ministers had any great authority over the canton chief. Actually, the ministers' role, as has been pointed out, was to act as intermediaries between the emperor and the canton chiefs. They could not, however, under any right or pretext, intervene in canton affairs, since the kombéré was the only lord in the area whose command had been conferred upon him as an appanage by the Mogho Naba.

That is why it has been possible for canton chiefs who were dissatisfied with the minister under whose rule they found themselves to report, henceforth, to another minister. Furthermore, the Mogho Naba saw no objection to this. The Mossi expression, Gamsobend'ka sambiri n'tont vigri yé ("hospitality is not like kinship; you can evade it") amply illustrates the accuracy of the foregoing. If it is further noted that before the French occupation the naba came to Ouagadougou only once a year to pay their respects to the emperor and to bring him annual tribute, one will readily understand the insignificance of the ministers' authority over them.

This does not mean, of course, that it was possible to [50] do without any intermediaries, but rather that it was possible to choose them freely. In any case, one of the incentives to

567 part of the emperor's harem. The dapobi belonging to the canton chiefs, belonging to the kombemba, are of the same origin. While the Mogho Naba could not sell the dapobi of Kibissi origin, the emperor and the canton chiefs could do as they liked with the true dapobi. They were sold for the most trifling faults and their wives and children were either sent away with them or turned over to other deserving captives.

Slaves of the Crown. (a) The bangaré. These are Peulh captives who have gradually cast off the authority of their masters and who have submitted voluntarily to the authority of the Mogho Naba.

A herd of cattle is called nab'bangaré, and it seems likely that the word bangaré, "herd," to designate this type of slave came from that source. However, the bangaré are not solely former Peulh slaves since a free individual who has committed a serious crime in his [90] native village and fears reprisal comes to join the "herd."

Once presented to the Mogho Naba, they were henceforth considered slaves and, as such, immune from prosecution.

567 The principal bangaré villages, generally known as "independent
●62 villages," are: Kaïbo (province of Gounga); Manghin, Zaanga (canton of Zorgongo); Zaon'pighin, Payaobtinga (canton of Boudry); Nabasnoghin (canton of Nedogo); Bangar'Nabilin (canton of Zorgo); Gandaogo (canton of Zoungou); Boumintoré, Sidtenga, Mandié, Bougoumbarga, etc.

567 The emperor could supply himself from these "herds" when-
681 ever the need arose. Any bangaré who had committed serious crimes or who had been denounced as dangerous individuals who spread disorder in the villages or committed robbery were castrated and made into eunuchs or sold by order of the emperor.

[582] The bangaré intermarry since no free Mossi father would give them a daughter in marriage. This is solely due to the fact that if the emperor decided to sell a bangaré, his family would share the same fate. The father of the wife would not intervene in such a case, because this might be dangerous for him. So it is easily understandable that, under these circumstances, no father would seek such a match.

567 Bangaré chiefs. The chiefs of bangaré villages [91] are ap-
622 pointed by the Mogho Naba. The villages themselves are free of any

776 find the leopard, which had suddenly vanished. The puzzled elders,
778 like the good Mossi they were, consulted the sorcerer who stated that
787 the leopard was their tangandé, and the thicket to which it had repaired was its sacred grove. He also prescribed the sacrifices to be offered.

776 As the blood of the victims flowed, the children saw a turtle
787 walking toward the sacred grove and tried to seize it. The elder prevented then from doing so and again resorted to the superior knowledge of the sorcerer to find out what this might possibly mean: a turtle entering the sacred grove during a sacrifice to the tangandé! The sorcerer pronounced the following oracle: the turtle is the child of the tangandé and thus becomes sacred to our village. Since that time the village has had the leopard and turtle as its tangandé /sic/.

776 The tangandé may actually be a stone or a tree which is regarded as the guardian of the village, but this is more unusual. The tangandé might perhaps be considered as a sort of village totem. If we take Salomon Reinach's definition of the totem as "the animal, plant, or more rarely mineral or heavenly body which the clan acknowledges as an ancestor, a protector, and a rallying sign," (3) we find that the

3. Salomon Reinach, Cultes, mythes et religion /Cults, Myths, and Religion/, p. 81.

tangandé is usually an animal, a guardian animal, but that it is not regarded as an ancestor and it does not serve as a rallying sign, for
[62] several villages may have the same tangamma /sic/—many have the crocodile and boa—without considering this as a bond between them.

Monseigneur Le Roy defines totemism as follows: "An institution consisting essentially of a magic pact, which reflects and constitutes a kinship, mystical and supernatural in nature, by which an invisible spirit in the visible shape of an animal, or, in exceptional cases, of a plant, mineral, or astral body, is associated with an individual, a family, a clan, a tribe, or a secret society for the purpose of reciprocal services." (4) This definition does not correspond to the

4. Mgr. Le Roy, La religion des primitifs /Primitive Religion/, p. 132.

643 669 of the electoral college was not accepted by the populace and disturbances occurred in spite of the proclamation of the king-elect. This was when Naba Sagha, the son of Naba Kom, was chosen. The people would have liked to see Kaoko, son of Naba Zombéré, nominated. Dissatisfied because the sovereign of their choice had not reached the throne, they would not acknowledge the man chosen by the college. The new monarch managed to take over the throne only after waging a bloody battle at the head of his followers against his unlucky rival.

645 635 The province chiefs who are ministers are nominated by the Moro Naba, who selects the man most deserving of the succession among the closest relatives of the chief to be replaced. Province chiefs enjoy considerable power in the administration of their provinces, they are surrounded with a large court, but they stand under the direct control of the Moro Naba.

635 It must be added that aside from the five provinces lying under the direct rule of the Moro Naba of Ouagadougou, there were four others (Boussouma and Béloussa to the northeast, Yako to the northwest, Tenkodogo to the southeast) that were mere vassal provinces and that actually enjoyed nearly complete autonomy prior to our occupation. Tenkodogo province was especially important.

The chiefs of these /latter/ provinces were true monarchs selected in the same fashion as the Moro Naba by the electoral college of their province. Once elected, they enjoyed all the prerogatives of sovereignty, nominating the canton chiefs and administering their provinces as they saw fit.

Their power was as absolute in their own sphere as that of the Moro Naba over the whole of his subject provinces, but they ac- [631] knowledged his sovereignty and offered him a gift as a token of their vassalage at the time when their powers were handed over to them.

634 624 /576/ Within the subject provinces, the canton chiefs were nominated by the Moro Naba on the basis of an introduction by the province chief. They were always selected among the closest relatives of the chief they were to replace, always descendants of Oubry, the first Moro Naba. They stood under the direct orders of the province chief, whom they had to use as an intermediary to communicate with the Moro Naba. It was their task to proceed with

634 621 the nomination of the village chiefs, who were always selected from the family of the preceding chief.

428 631 Let us add that in principle, and all other things being equal, it was the eldest son of the deceased chief who was supposed to succeed his father, and this applied to village chiefs as well as to canton chiefs, province chiefs, and the Moro Naba. This principle ran counter to the true patriarchal principle where the younger brother is always the natural and legitimate heir of the deceased brother. The requirements of a warlike existence had probably forced it upon the Mossi at the time of their conquest of the Dagomba and Mossi territories.

This principle of direct inheritance (rather than collateral inheritance) had been restricted, however, by the powers of higher authorities represented by canton chiefs vis-à-vis village chiefs, province chiefs vis-à-vis canton chiefs, the Moro Naba vis-à-vis the province chiefs, and the electoral college of the high dignitaries vis-à-vis the future Moro Naba. In short, the warriors' principle of inheritance from father to eldest son ruled among the Mossi in the power sphere, but had to give way to the exigencies of government whenever necessary.

631 Let us not believe that the third principle, namely the consent of the people involved, was altogether unknown among the Mossi (the consent of the village inhabitants in the case of a village chief, of the canton notables in the case of a canton chief, of the province notables in the case of a province chief, etc.) This third principle, however, was the least important, the least taken into account, the least actualized from a mere potential. /577/ Whenever it clashed with the others, it had to give way.

635 634 624 Let us add that the majority of Mossi chiefs were aided by representatives called baloum.

"The province chiefs," says the Monographie, "the majority of canton chiefs, and even the chiefs of a few important villages, are aided by one or several baloum or palace masters, whom they choose freely. These are sometimes former captives, but most frequently they are common natives or former soroné, and they are never nakomsé. Their function is not hereditary. It grants them the right to substitute for the naba, to speak and act in his name."

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Families	Compounds	Number of Persons
1st family	1	51
2nd family	6	132
3rd family	2	23
4th family	6	160
5th family	3	59
6th family	5	50
/225/ 7th family	9	136
8th family	3	79
9th family	8	242
10th family	4	158
11th family	4	151
	51	1, 241

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This gives us an average of 113 persons per family, 5 compounds per family, and 24 persons per compound.

Now, here are the villages in the little canton of Lako or Lago.

Villages	Families	Compounds	Number of Persons
Bô	2	3	89
Boulounsi	1	3	137
Ninga	2	12	146
Piga-Sorodé	1	2	35
Réga	4	17	484
Viré-Sorodé	3	4	242
Diogoré	1	8	352
Lako	7	25	1, 457
Touba	3	3	216
Nango-Yarsé (Mossi of the village)	1	1	7
Totals	25	78	3, 165

592 This gives us an average of 126 or 127 persons per family, 3 com-
596 pounds per family, and 40 or 41 people per compound.
162 Now, here are some other statistics.
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Villages	Families	Compounds	Households	Number of Persons
Lougouri	2	4	48	157
Oula	2	5	43	149
Réka	1	2	3	46
Noungou	2	14	46	233
Zirè	1	3	36	197
Kindiba	7	35	149	736
Diessiré	5	15	49	286
Bissigaï	4	17	100	510
Bougounam	8	32	151	999
Totals	32	127	625	3, 313

/226/ On an average, this gives us 103 or 104 persons per family, 26 persons per compound, 5 persons per household, 4 compounds or soukala per family.

Here are some statistics collected in the canton of Koussouka and covering those villages which are entirely Mossi as well as those which are predominantly Mossi.

Villages	Families	Compounds	Households	Population
Rondo	7	72	148	975
Bouga-Mossi	1	11	23	152
Sékéba	1	9	28	183
Zandoma	3	24	62	344
Tangué	7	26	67	439
Konga-Mossi	3	23	72	483
Iroum	2	63	159	880
Totals	24	228	559	3, 456

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Fourteenth compound	6	36
Fifteenth compound	1	5
	49	286

This gives us, therefore:

Compounds with several households (more than two)..	7
Compounds with several households (two)	4
Compounds with a single household	4
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Now that these statistics have been listed, let us examine in detail the groupings larger than the single household, which may be categorized as follows: (1) the total family; (2) the compound; (3) the work group.

596 The total family. —As we stated earlier, the total family /228/ does not occupy one and the same compound. It is divided into a number of zaka or iri of varying size (the average number given by the above statistics is five). One of these compounds is that of the boudoukasaman or head of the family, who governs the whole family and is at the same time the head of his own zaka and head of his work group. As head of the family, he holds definitively only three types of powers: (1) religious powers; (2) judicial powers; (3) the right to give the daughters of the whole family in marriage.

As head of the family, he has no economic powers.

We shall study the religious powers of the boudoukasaman in detail under "Religion (Sacerdotal Organization)" /not translated/. Let us [592] simply state here that although the head of the total family holds the highest religious powers, the zakasoba or heads of compounds are not totally deprived of them, and this contributes to the greater autonomy of these subfamilies.

I am borrowing the following particulars on the family head and the family council which assists him from Vadier's excellent monograph, here and there correcting some inexact details.

"The head of the family, or patriarch," says Vadier, "is the oldest member of the family. It is he who is the head of it.

"He enjoys great authority over all family members, but exclusively in regard to personal matters. To him alone, after obtaining the consent of the fathers, belongs the right to give the young girls of the

596 182 592 Here the zaka is quite clearly reduced to the single household, which becomes identified at the same time with the compound and with the work group. Let us state, however, that in the whole of Ratenga there are 4, 637 Mossi for 458 compounds, or ten persons per compound. An average of ten people per compound represents slightly more than a single household (which averages six persons in Yatenga), but not as much as two households. This means that the compounds sometimes contain two households, sometimes only one. Thus, since there are only a few people in each zaka, there is but a single work group.

162 592 621 Here is a complete numerical breakdown of the canton of Ratenga.

Villages	Inhabitants	Compounds	Average per Compound
Napalra	254	20	13
Ouembatenga	61	5	12
Alaga	335	22	15
Boulounga	197	23	9
Bani	387	30	13
Singuitenga	248	18	14
Boudé	69	11	6
Foulgo-Koquin	22	5	4
Zomkalga	88	12	7
Momoné	86	10	9
Toïsi	100	13	8
Denian	4	1	4
Pinsi	145	13	11
Dologa	110	15	7
Kiédéwendé	103	10	10
/233/ Koundi-Bittou	63	9	7
Yalka	56	4	14
Koumbango	221	19	12
Kourpellé	167	15	11
Zimtenga	307	39	8
Battenga	94	11	9
Badnoro	83	10	8
Douré	96	6	16
Yalgatenga	45	8	6

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Villages	Inhabitants	Compounds	Average per Compound
Bargo	77	8	10
Lo	127	14	9
Rakoéga-Tenga	33	4	8
Moro-Koquin	37	7	5
Dougouré	41	7	6
Bama	82	7	12
Kora	99	9	11
Tangué	110	14	8
Minima	113	12	9
Kanion	75	10	7
Toukoulounga	124	4	31
Tempelra	35	6	6
Bauda	162	5	32
Kargo-Mossi	181	22	8
	4,637	458	10

The same applies to the Mossi of the canton of Tougo, located south-southeast of Yatenga. Here are the figures concerning the number of compounds and the number of people in the canton.

Villages	Compounds	Persons	Average per Compound
Tibtenga	9	102	11
Béma	96	792	8
Ouembatenga	9	76	8
Rima	63	347	5 to 6
Tougo	69	937	13 to 14
Lébenga	4	40	10
Danaoua	22	229	10
Rasoumdé	27	189	7
Mangoulouma	2	28	14
Rikéba	52	545	10 to 11
Totals	353	3,285	9 to 10

593 684 The Moro Naba, after he has been notified by the family council, pronounces the forfeiture of paternal authority. In case of incest, the guilty party was driven out of the territory.

593 Duties of children toward their parents. —The children owe obedience to their father and mother. They also owe them respect.

Their labor obligations are distributed among the fields of the work group, the father's private fields, the mother's small private plots, and their own little plots. Naturally they work most on the large fields belonging to the work group.

304 881 Circumcision. —Circumcision is performed at the age of 13 or 14. It takes place in the month of December, hence during the dry, cool season. At this time the children are not needed to help in the fields, as they are in the winter season. This is also the case in the hot, dry season, but at that time the wounds would heal less quickly. This leaves the dry, cold season, which is excellently suited to the treatment of the circumcised, a time when the children have nothing whatever to do and the grown-ups very little.

304 621 593 881 Circumcision is performed on a certain number of children at the same time. When a small village is involved, all the children in the village are circumcised at once. When a large village is involved, the children in each quarter are circumcised together. The children themselves ask their big brother if they may be circumcised when they feel that they have reached a suitable age for this operation. The big brother decides and says yes or no.

304 326 881 The children also set the exact date for the circumcision and go to the man who has charge of the operation to make the arrangements. In Yatenga, as a rule, he is a blacksmith (at Ouahigouya, for example, from the quarter of the Baloum-Naba). Sometimes, however, non-blacksmiths, either Foulsé or Mossi, perform the operation. When a performer of operations dies, he is replaced by someone who knows how to circumcise, either a brother or a son of the deceased or someone from another family.

304 881 Circumcision is not performed in the evening or at night, as happens among other Blacks of West Africa, but at six o'clock in the morning. A particularly kind man among the people of the quarter or of the village has been chosen by the children who are to be circumcised. He wakes them up on that morning and takes them to the man who is to perform the operation. Big brothers accompany their younger brothers, but the father and mother do not witness the operation and are not even

8: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1958
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Karême), celebrate the great festival of Ramadan and the lesser festivals, and aspire to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Most of the Moslems can lead prayers, but only about one-tenth of their number can read and recite the Koran. However, today the masters (*karasambas*) of the 32 Koranic schools in the district are endeavoring to instruct the many boys and few girls in reading the Koran and understanding Moslem theology.

The Karême is observed by most adult Moslems in the community with the exception of invalids and working men. Moslems say that the fast is intended to turn the minds of the people to God, and they distinguish between the Moslems "of the mouth" who break the fast and those "of the heart" who fast until Ramadan. The crescent moon of Ramadan is greeted with guns and general rejoicing and the following morning the Moslems gather at the tomb of Ngado to give praises to God; during the rest of the day they pay homage to the chief and visit their friends. However, a change in the traditional observance of Ramadan is expected, because one of the Moslem leaders objects to the ceremony at the tomb of Ngado. He feels that some Moslems are beginning to regard the tomb of the first Moslem as an earth shrine or Tengkougre.

So far, only five of the more prominent Moslems in the district have made or are making the pilgrimage to Mecca. The first man made the voyage about seven years ago, and is now conducting a Koranic school in a neighboring district. His brother went to Mecca about two years ago and is now the senior *El Hadj* in the district. Of the two men who were on the pilgrimage when I arrived in the district, one has since died near the Red Sea and the other is still away. One other man left for Mecca and returned to the district during my stay. Most of the pilgrims now fly to Mecca; only two men followed the traditional route through Ghana, Kano, Lake Chad, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (now Sudan), and on to Mecca. In general, all pilgrims have used their own resources for the trip, but they receive some help from their lineage brothers and from the other Moslems in the district and in Ouagadougou.

The pilgrimage to Mecca represents the greatest event in the lives of the district Moslems. When the last pilgrim left, a great crowd gathered at his house and prayed for his safe journey, and some even accompanied him to Ouagadougou and remained there until he left. The Moslems and many pagans of the district, under the command of the district chief, cultivated his fields during his absence. And when the new El Hadj returned, a large crowd accompanied him to his house with shouts of joy. There he killed a sheep in thanksgiving, sprinkled the crowd with holy water from Mecca, and recounted his experiences. His listeners were impressed by his airplane flight and the description of Mecca, but they showed the greatest interest when he said that Mecca women covered their faces and that most Meccan men were monogamous. The local Moslems smiled when they heard this bit of news from one of their members, but I have seen them scowl when discussing the monogamous practice desired by the Christians.

The attitudes of Moslems differ very little from those of the other Mossi as regards children and polygyny. They say that they do not believe in the

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
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appealed to the district chief, and occasionally the woman was sent back. A nobleman set on having a certain girl as a wife usually had small bracelets like those worn by all noble wives placed on her ankles. Once this was done, the chief could not be compelled to send her back to her parents, and any man who tried to retrieve her was guilty of interfering with a nobleman's wife and could be killed for it. In fact, only the male relatives of noblemen's wives could converse with them without running the risk of being apprehended and executed.

The district was the most important unit in the Mossi principalities and kingdoms. It was on this level that the Mossi nobility came into direct contact with the various social and ethnic groups of the society. Here, kinship and affinal ties linked the conquerors and the conquered, the ancient and recent nobility, the refugees from conflicts over the nam and the resident aliens, in a network of social, ritual, economic, and political relationships. It was also on this level that myths and traditions legitimized most effectively the Mossi socio-economic and political system as well as the relationships between the various social and ethnic groups.

The number and size of the Mossi districts varied greatly from one principality or kingdom to another. Some districts were large and wealthy, with a number of large villages; smaller districts had a larger proportion of small villages and hamlets. The average number of these small units was probably between fifty and sixty-five per district. The population of the districts ranged from 10,000 to 35,000 persons. Some *tense* (villages) had as many as 5,000 inhabitants and some as few as 50. The average village had about 500 inhabitants. But regardless of size, all Mossi districts and component villages had basically the same structure and fulfilled the same functions. The structure of Nobere district is representative. Nobere covered approximately 200 square miles. It was bounded on the east by a district called Manga, on the north by the districts of Toece and Djiba, and on the west and south by the Red Volta River. A census taken in 1905, just nine years after the European conquest, showed the Nobere population to be about 13,200.[10] In 1955 approximately 10,000 persons inhabited 24 villages and hamlets scattered through the more inhabitable part of the district.

The number of villages and hamlets in Nobere district apparently fluctuated. Villages were occasionally abandoned, while small hamlets grew into prominent settlements. The people of Nobere always tried to establish their villages as close to the Red Volta as possible in order to utilize the more fertile lands. But they were repeatedly driven back by disease and

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
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marauding animals. Just twenty years ago, the six villages that lay closest to the river were gradually abandoned and their populations absorbed by other villages. As of 1955, three of these populations were still paying allegiance to their former chiefs—a fact that bears out the Mossi axiom that chiefs govern people rather than land. The three other chiefs had lost control over their followers, who had placed themselves under the protection of the chiefs of their host villages. On occasion, Nobere also lost villages to other districts. One such village, Rissoma, was taken away from Nobere and given to Djiba when one of the Nobere district chiefs had a dispute with the Mogho Naba.

The hub or center of Nobere district, like that of all Mossi districts, was Nab'tenga (also called Nobere Naba Tenga, or Na-tenga), the village of the district chief. This village was rather large and in many respects a replica in miniature of the capital of Ouagadougou. Like most Mossi villages, Nab'tenga was divided into sections, quarters, or neighborhoods called *saghse* (sing. *saka*), which included a number of compounds (*yiya*, sing. *yiri*; or *zaghse*, sing. *zaka*). The district chief's compound was called Nab'yiri. He lived there surrounded by his wives, unmarried daughters, younger children, and pages. His older male children lived in separate compounds within the same saka. The saghse of Nab'tenga included Ouidi, the saka of the Ouidi Naba; Balbalse, the saka of the Baloum Naba; Tansoba, the saka of the local war minister (Tansoba or Tampsobo); Baglere, the saka of the chief's serfs; Bendere, the saka of the chief's musicians; Ouedrange, the saka of the chief's grooms; and Pwese, the saka of the guardians of the chief's wives. Scattered among them were the saghse of noble families, smiths, the Moslem Imam, and other persons. The most important market place in the district was located about four hundred yards from the chief's compound.

The number and types of social and ethnic groups within the district and its villages reflected Nobere's history. When the French arrived, the district chief was Kaglere, a descendant of Ngado, who was a son of Mogho Naba Sagha I (ca. 1787–1803). Ngado had been sent to Nobere at the end of the eighteenth century to replace Naba Peka (a descendant of Naba Biligo), who had been deposed and killed by Mogho Naba Sagha during a civil war. The other chiefly descendants of Biligo, however, were not deposed by Ngado; they remained in charge of all but five or six of the major villages in the district. The chiefs of such villages as Ronse, Barkago, Tewarka, and Pinse are *yagense* (descendants) of Naba Biligo. The village called Passintenga was ruled by the descendants of a Busanga from Lenga called Passentre, who allegedly had been given a wife by Biligo. It is not

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
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634 known, however, whether this woman was Biligo's daughter or one of his
622 pughsiudse. The people of Passintenga claimed descent from Biligo's
175 daughter, but the other groups in the district questioned this ancestry. The village called Bourougna had two chiefs. One, the Tang Naba, was descended from a son of a Ouidi Naba of Ouagadougou who had settled in Nobere; the other, the Yang Naba, claimed descent from an aboriginal Ninisi man and woman of Biligo's lineage. The Yang Naba was thus another of Biligo's yagense in the district. The chief of Nimpwe village was a descendant of the aboriginal Ninisi people and was the principal Tengsoba in the district. He had more ritual power than political power, however. The nam of Basbedo village was held by a man descended from Busansi refugees. Living in this village was a man with the honorific title of Soulougre Naba, who claimed descent from the most important Ninisi family who had lived in the district prior to the arrival of Biligo.

634 Most of the nobles of the local ruling lineage lived either in the saghse
173 of the district villages or in isolated hamlets. Local tradition holds that one
621 of the conditions set by Naba Ngado for allowing Biligo's descendants to
[613] remain as village chiefs was the right to settle nineteen of his sons in many
[565] of the villages. He allegedly sent *mabissi* (sons of the same mother) to the same village. By so doing, he took advantage of the normal lines of fission that are created after the death of a Mossi father and prevented undue rivalries. Yet there was no driving necessity for him to do so, because there were more villages than chief's sons available. In fact, there are still many villages without nobles in Nobere district. The people of Passintenga, for instance, allegedly refused to have nobles live among them, while the people of Nimpwe allegedly killed by sorcery all the nobles who ever tried to live there. The actual reason for the absence of nobles in these villages may have been that the district chief did not wish to send his sons to villages into which his daughters had married or where there lived earth priests who
[565] were thought to be powerful sorcerers. Nobles were often unwelcome, feared, and resisted, because they tended to exploit the village people and to take advantage of the commoners.

621 The villages of Nobere district, like those of other Mossi districts, were
167 populated in part by refugees and strangers. Several saghse in Togese vil-
173 lage were inhabited by Mossi refugees who had fled a district called Guiergo after a fight over the nam of that district. Scattered throughout the district's villages were people of unknown origin called Siamse. The Siamse found in the villages of Tewaka and Nabadogo claimed that their ancestors had "followed" Naba Biligo when he came down from Ouagadougou to found the district. Several saghse in Bourougna village were in-

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habited by Yarse, people of Mandingo origin who had been assimilated by the Mossi. There were no Fulani in Nobere, even though some lived in nearby districts. But in Pinse village there lived people called Simili-Mossi, who claimed descent from Fulani herdsmen and Mossi women. Basbedo village was inhabited and ruled by people of Busansi origin. They claimed that their ancestors had fled from famine and other hardships in Busansi country and had been granted haven by Naba Biligo. The people who lived in the two saghse of Nab'tenga called Dapore (Dapobi) and Baglere (Bangare) were serfs of diverse non-Mossi origin. Saghse or compounds of Gurunsi slaves were found close to the dwellings of nobles and village chiefs throughout the district.

The number of saghse in the villages of Nobere district varied according to the size of the village and the pattern of nam inheritance within the major lineage segment that ruled the village. The saka itself housed a minor-lineage segment. The larger the village's minor lineage segment and the greater this group's genealogical depth, the more numerous were its component segments and thus its saghse. The proliferation of saghse and minor-lineage segments within the ruling lineage of a village was dependent primarily on possession of the nam. As soon as a man received the nam, he obtained control over a large amount of goods and services. He was then in a position to obtain many wives for himself and his immediate relatives, and as a result his minimal lineage grew rapidly. In time this group became so large that it split from its brother babissi within the saka, and formed a new saka of its own. Finally, this babissi became a minor lineage in its own saka, in segmental opposition to the other babissi and minor lineages within the other saghse. If the descendants of one man retained the nam for about three generations, their lineage segment and saka grew larger and in time cast off its own junior segments. However, if the segment lost the nam to a man of another babissi and saka, it ceased to proliferate. Some such groups even declined and disappeared by fusing with other local segments of the same lineage. Here is how the system worked in Barkago village of Nobere district.

Barkago itself was founded sometime in the dim past by a son of Naba Biligo. It had an area of eight or ten square miles and a population of about 650 when the French arrived in 1896. Its boundaries were set by such natural phenomena as clumps of trees, hills, and ravines. The village itself included five distinct saghse separated by footpaths, hills, rocks, and ravines, and an area of wasteland (*weogho*). Three of the saghse, Natenga ("chief's land"), Godin, and Kedpalago, were inhabited by the minor segments of the boodoo of Naba Biligo. Here is how this came about. After

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the original segment of the ruling Biligo lineage had lived in Barkago for some time, it divided into two minor lineages and settled in two saghse, Natenga and Godin. A noble from Godin possessed the nam, but it eventually passed to a noble from Natenga. The new chief then founded a new saka called Kedpalago because he wanted more living space for his own children. As a result, the minor lineage of Natenga now had two babissi living in two saghse. The minor lineage of Godin subsequently declined in size and prestige. The only evidence of its former importance was that its eldest male continued to make separate sacrifices to his own chiefly ancestors, even though the more recent holders of the nam made sacrifices to all former chiefs. These independent sacrifices were made in spite of the fact that this minor lineage kept growing smaller because its male members left to live elsewhere or to join maternal patrilineages with higher status. The sacrifices were expected to cease only if and when the minor lineage were to disappear with the incorporation of the widows and orphans of its last surviving males into the other Biligo groups of the village and district. Of course, if the Godin minor lineage had regained the nam, it undoubtedly would have experienced a rebirth and renewal of strength. It might have attracted its daughter's sons, and even aliens who would have lived in its saghse as they did in those of the ruling lineage segments.

A fourth saka, Nakomgo ("we hunger after the nam"), was inhabited by the noble descendants of Naba Ngado, the district chief who had replaced the descendant of Naba Biligo of Nobere. Since these nobles traced their descent from two full brothers, Kouliga and Kongo, they formed two related minor lineages with five component minimal lineages. The compounds of the two babissi of the Kouliga minor lineage were separate but contiguous. Near them were the compounds of the three babissi of the Kongo minor lineage. Scattered about in the Nakomgo saka were compounds of sisters' sons, strangers, and nobles' slaves.

The people of Narila, the fifth saka of Barkago, were members of the aboriginal Nimisi population, and thus furnished the village's earth-priest. He made sacrifices to the earth shrines in the village, gave ritual permission for building compounds and digging graves, and took control of the village during the period between the death of a chief and the accession of another. Scattered throughout the various saghse were compounds inhabited by people of serf, slave, or refugee origin.

Of all the groups within the village, the Ngado people kept the most exact genealogies. They did so because one of the segments of their maximal lineage held the district nam, and as nobles they had theoretical access to it. Once they had lost the nam of the district, the descendants of Biligo

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also lost much of their interest in preserving their genealogies. Their local lineage segment, which controlled the village nam, still showed interest in its genealogy, but the people of Godin did not quite remember how they were related to the ruling lineage segment. Several times in the recent history of Barkago (and other villages), the men who were given the village nam had to be recalled from distant villages where they were living with maternal patrilineages. So relatively unimportant was possession of the village nam without concomitant noble status that after Naba Ngado took over, the local Biligo people began to ignore all local genealogical records except descent from Biligo. The Ninisi people had the least reason to be interested in their genealogy, and they simply ignored it. They had been separated from the other Ninisi groups in the district for so long that they did not even forbid marriage into those groups.

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In villages such as Barkago, the existence of several lineage groupings and families of strangers facilitated local marriages. But in villages with fewer lineage groups, the time came when all groups were so closely linked by marriage and affinal alliances that for all practical purposes the village became an exogamous unit. By 1956, this process had reached such an advanced stage in Barkago that hardly any marriages took place between the Ninisi and Biligo local lineage segments. Both groups were permitted to marry the local descendants of Ngado, because the latter were more recent arrivals in the village. These marriages were of great significance to all villagers because they linked the nobles and the commoners in a series of exchanges. Moreover, because the groups were linked through sisters' sons [565] with special privileges in both groups, problems deriving from status differences were more easily solved. Even the most arrogant noble was often [606] constrained by ancestral sanctions to maintain amicable relations with his [607] in-laws.

The Biligo lineage of Barkago contracted marriages with the other, non-related groups within and without the district. The Ngado people did likewise. Whether these nobles were able to marry noble women of other districts is a moot point. Owing to distance and politics, no such marriages are known to have occurred, and no one seems to know whether they were permissible. The Ninisi, who had always been commoners, had the largest marriage circle of all the village groups. They were able to marry nobles, commoners, and the Ninisi of the district and other districts.

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The inhabitants of a Mossi village built their houses and cultivated their crops on land the village chief had granted to their respective lineages. Since the royal lineage, by right of conquest, controlled all of Mossi country, the rights of usufruct of a lineage depended ultimately on the Mogho [643]

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The newly elected monarch secreted himself either at the Samande Nabila's home or elsewhere in the capital until daybreak. Tradition holds that if he were killed before being officially proclaimed before his subjects as the new ruler, the assassin could become Mogho Naba.[39]

The public ceremonies marking the official proclamation of the new ruler's accession to power took place on the following day. Early that morning, the monarch left his secret sleeping quarters and proceeded to the Koumbi Naba's house. Here he dressed in his white garments and mounted an old, unsaddled horse. The Baloum Naba then gave him a sack containing the *samtibo*, which he placed over his shoulder, and the Kaizi Naba led him out of the courtyard by the women's door. As the ruler's horse passed through the gate, his sister, the *Napoko* ("female ruler"), cried, "The sun has reappeared! The fire is relighted! The earth lives again!" A large crowd of musicians and warriors who had been alerted by the ministers shouted and danced as they accompanied the monarch, who circled the compound three times.[40] The ruler then reentered the compound, and this time he came out through the men's door as a sign of his full status. Here he was greeted by the Ouidi Naba, who proclaimed in a loud voice, "Mossi people, here is the Mogho Naba!" The warriors shouted and fired their muskets, and the musicians played. Then all the dignitaries and their followers solemnly prostrated themselves and paid homage and swore allegiance to their monarch. He, in turn, listened attentively when his ministers and some of the elder chiefs gave him advice about how the affairs of state should be conducted. After each declaration of loyalty or word of counsel, the people shouted in praise of their ruler. The Bendere Naba, accompanied by his musicians, then recited the ruler's genealogy, announced the pledges the new monarch had made to his people, and acclaimed him by his royal title, "Mogho Naba [X]." From this moment on, no child born during his reign could bear the ruler's name, and those persons who already bore it called themselves *Nab'yure* ("king's name").

As the next stage in the ceremony the Mogho Naba, accompanied by his retinue, visited the various wards in the capital. In each he was proclaimed ruler and received the allegiance of both Mossi and non-Mossi ward chiefs. He visited the wards controlled by such men as the Loumbila Naba, the Sapone Naba, and the Ouagadougou Naba, and at each stop the ward chief declared, "People of [X], here is your new sovereign." Having been acknowledged by the leading chiefs of the capital, the new ruler then returned to his host's house. He emerged later in the day to visit the compound of a palace attendant, the Samande Nabila, where he sat under a

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to render homage to the monarch. This attracted the attention of the Mogho Naba, who investigated the grievance of the district chief. If the provincial minister were found to be in serious error, he might be deposed and executed. The Ouidi Naba was theoretically exempt from such punishment, but it is doubtful that a strong monarch would have allowed even this official to cause trouble.

A provincial governor dissatisfied with a district chief under his charge could, under certain conditions, have him deposed and put to death. He achieved this by complaining to the monarch that the chief was either withholding tribute or misgoverning his people. In most cases, however, the minister could curb the district chief by hinting that his son would not receive a recommendation as successor to the nam of the district. This was usually enough to win the cooperation of the most recalcitrant chief, if only because his future status as the honored ancestor of a ruling local line would be jeopardized if he rebelled. These sanctions were thus sufficient to ensure satisfactory relations between the provincial ministers and their district chiefs, at least on the surface. This was to the advantage of both groups, since in the final analysis the failure of either to administer or rule well might result in the death penalty.

Many districts and villages in Ouagadougou were administered not by the provincial ministers but by officials directly responsible to the Mogho Naba. The districts in question were often ruled by close relatives of the Mogho Naba or by persons who had gained his good graces. The villages were often inhabited by slaves and governed by headmen who were themselves slaves. Like the other territories of the Mogho Naba, these districts and villages were not physically contiguous. The districts were mixed in with districts administered by the provincial ministers, and the villages stood within the territorial boundaries of district chiefs. Whenever the Mogho Naba wanted to communicate with a chief of such a village or district, he sent one of his retainers. The chiefs, in turn, used their own people to send messages and goods to Ouagadougou. The general administration of these districts and villages differed little from that of the territories administered by the provincial ministers. The main difference was that the Mogho Naba took a greater interest in their everyday affairs. This called for greater efficiency on the part of local officials; for they, like the other chiefs, faced the penalty of deposition and death for maladministration.

Of all Mossi officials, the district chiefs had the most difficult administrative task. They were in direct contact with the people, and thus ran a greater risk of being charged with misgovernment. Countless district chiefs were deposed and executed because they had allegedly disobeyed or rebelled

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Naba Baongo (ca. 1800–30) decided that it was more profitable to sell them.[15] Subsequent rulers, especially the two Mogho Nanamse who ruled just prior to the French conquest, sold most of their captives to passing caravans or in special sections of the larger markets. When other persons sold slaves in the market, the Raga Naba collected some 1,000 cowries on each transaction—the largest tax on any market commodity.

The Mossi rulers seem to have benefited even more from the sale of eunuchs, for they had a monopoly over them. The Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou sent some captured slaves and all recidivous thieves to Teemetenga village in Koubri district, some 13 miles south of the capital, to be operated upon.[17] So successful were the Mossi surgeons that—in contrast to specialists in other areas, who lost nine lives for every successful castration—the mortality among the Mossi was only one out of ten.[18] Some of the eunuchs furnished by the Mossi were sold as far away as Constantinople, a fact which surprised the French ambassador to Turkey who saw them there in 1900.[19]

In addition to slaves and eunuchs, the Mogho Naba kept a large number of bondsmen to provide services for him. One group, the Dapore, lived in a ward of the capital called Dapoya, and had a chief, the Dapore Naba, who was himself a Dapore. The origin of these people is obscure, but they seem to have been the children of foreign captives who were brought to Ouagadougou and placed in the ruler's service. Some of them even claimed that their ancestors had come to Ouagadougou voluntarily and had placed themselves under the care and protection of the ruler. This seems unlikely, however, since the status of these people resembles that of persons captured by Sudanese rulers and installed in special wards as serfs.[20] Some of the Dapore lived in villages of their own and cultivated fields for the Mogho Naba. Others lived in a ward of Ouagadougou, served in the palace household, and provided the royal executioners. Some were selected to serve as palace eunuchs, and placed under the charge of the Kamsaogho Naba. The Dapore were hardly ever sold unless they were convicted criminals. The Mogho Naba and his chiefs refrained from selling serfs or captives who had been born in Mossi country. However, they often claimed the sons and daughters of these people as pages or pughsiudse.

The Baglere made up the second group of bondsmen providing services for the Mogho Naba. They, too, lived in a special ward and were headed by the Baglere Naba, one of their own people. Their origin is also obscure: some of them claimed to be descended from Fulani slaves who had run away from their masters and sought asylum in Mossi country; others believed that they were the descendants of foreign captives. The Baglere

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worked for the Mogho Naba in and around the palace courtyard, and in the fields. They also kept his herds and provided him with animals from their own herds. Like the Dapore, they were seldom sold, but they often had to give their sons and daughters to the Mogho Naba.

The last group of persons who contributed their services to the Mogho Naba were the Kamboinse. Their origin is also unclear. Most of my respondents claimed that the Kamboinse and their chief first came to Ouagadougou from the direction of the Gold Coast, that they bore guns, and that they offered their services as guards to the Mogho Naba.[21] Later on, the sovereign allegedly assigned slaves to the Kamboinse unit, with the result that the entire group eventually took on a serf-like character. The Kamboinse guarded the Mogho Naba's palace and seized for him the goods of persons whom he condemned to death.

The services performed for the Mogho Naba by his pages and other youthful retainers also contributed significantly to the support of his administration. We have already seen how these young men and boys took care of his every need and functioned as important messengers within the royal household. The Mogho Naba also had control over the daughters of his serfs, whom he used to obtain revenue from aliens and subjects alike. Periodically, the Mogho Naba gave one of these girls as pughsiudga to a man, thus obligating him to render goods and services to the court. Moreover, the man had to return the eldest daughter he had by this wife to the Mogho Naba as a future pughsiudga. In this way, the sovereign had a revolving store of women through whom he could bind men to himself in a nexus of obligations, and from whom he eventually received additional women.[22]

The provincial ministers of the Ouagadougou kingdom occupied such a strategic position within the central administration that anyone rendering gifts or tribute to the Mogho Naba always gave presents to them as well. Their main source of revenue, however, came from the villages under their direct control, and from the retainers who lived in their compounds and in their wards in the capital. The economic relations between the ministers and their villages were similar to those between the district chiefs and their villages, and will be discussed below. The retainers, serfs, and slaves who served these ministers provided them with many of the services their counterparts rendered to the Mogho Naba. They kept their houses in repair and provided them with firewood and with fodder for their horses. Many of them also cultivated fields for their masters. Whenever the ministers needed extra goods or services, they called on those persons who lived in their compounds or in their wards. For example, hun-

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dreds of persons lived in Ouidin, the ward of the Ouidi Naba. Some of them were related to him; others had been attracted by his wealth and by his ability to obtain wives for his charges. All of them benefited from being attached to him in one way or another, and in return helped him to augment his income.

All the district chiefs sent women to their provincial ministers to be kept as wives (and thus as agricultural workers), or to be given out as pughsiudse. The Kamsaogho Naba received more pughsiudse than the other ministers because he was in charge of the wealthier districts, and also of course distributed more. The Baloum Naba was especially favored in another respect. Each year, he was entitled to call several *seghse* (sing. *seka*; a corvée or convocation) of his former pages and their relatives to help cultivate his fields. The Ouidi Naba's sources of revenue were about the same as the Baloum Naba's. In addition, his position as chief minister enabled him to obtain numerous gifts from persons who visited Ouagadougou. Moreover, the Mogho Naba often gave him horses from the fado of deceased district chiefs. The Larhalle Naba had full ministerial privileges, and a few other means of obtaining revenue. He was allowed, for instance, to keep the animals that had not been sacrificed on the graves of deceased rulers.

The provincial ministers received many goods and services from the district chiefs of their provinces. Whenever one of these ministers sent a messenger to the district, the chief gave the messenger money and livestock for his master. Furthermore, the district chiefs brought presents for their minister when they paid their annual visit to Ouagadougou to render homage to the Mogho Naba. The provincial ministers used their position as confidants and advisers to obtain as many presents as possible from persons who came to Ouagadougou to ask special favors from the Mogho Naba, to participate in judicial proceedings, or to seek the nam. Moreover, they cooperated with each other in these exactions, so that a person seeking a favor from or through one minister was prudently advised to give presents to or to seek the aid of the others.

The district chief played a key role in the procurement of revenue for the central administration, and derived an income for himself in the process. The seignorial rights over the Mossi people delegated by the Mogho Naba to all nam holders were quite obvious on this level. The district chief had rights to all valuable fruit trees, such as locust-bean and shea-butter, that grew within the boundaries of his territory. He instructed the village chiefs to harvest the fruit of these trees and send it to him. The village chiefs even had to send him the wood from the fallen branches of these trees.

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The district chiefs did not often exercise their rights over fruit trees in the weogho, as the wasteland in the districts was called. If a villager went into the weogho and collected fruit or wood from the chief's trees, he surrendered only part of it to the chief. On the other hand, if he received permission from a district chief to farm in the weogho, he was obliged to gather and send to the chief the fruit on any valuable trees. A district chief sometimes granted the rights over certain fruit trees in the inhabited areas to specific families or individuals, for personal reasons or as a reward for services. In such cases, the chief forfeited his rights to these trees, but retained his rights to the others.[18]

District chiefs also controlled all the resources of creeks and pools within their jurisdiction that were not sacred to certain aboriginal families, or which had not been transferred to specific persons. The aboriginal Ninisi families always notified the district chief when they planned to perform their annual fishing rite to the earth deities. He, in turn, sent representatives to the ceremony, and they were given part of the catch as his share. Persons who were granted permission to fish in the chief's water holes gave him a substantial part of their catch, and even those persons who had private control of fishing places regularly did the same.

The district chiefs also had rights to certain parts of animals caught in their territories. This applied especially to animals caught with such traditional weapons as traps, clubs, bows and arrows, and spears. Men who had obtained flint guns and other firearms from the Ashanti or elsewhere and who had bought their own powder were not obliged to give the chief a part of their game, but it was always prudent to do so. According to a long-standing tradition, the tusk and legs of a slain elephant that were not resting on the ground belonged to the chief, and those that lay on the ground belonged to the Tengsoba in whose ritual jurisdiction the animal had been slain. But the district chief's secular power was so much stronger than the Tengsoba's sacred power that he usually took both tusks, leaving the Tengsoba only two legs. The district chief also received other portions of elephants and parts of all the larger animals killed in his territory. And when hunters in the district were successful in the chase, they usually gave him entire small animals.

Every village in a district contributed to the district chief's revenue by performing special services for him. Certain villages were responsible for keeping specific huts in his compound in good condition; others, whose lands bordered on the woods, had to provide firewood for his compound; and yet others furnished grass and other fodder for his horses. Many villages had the task of cultivating special fields and crops for the district chief.

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For example, the villagers of Barkago traditionally cultivated and harvested a field of millet behind his compound for the chief. The people of Pinse, Donse, Passingtenga, and Tewarka cultivated millet for him in their own villages, and those of Togose and Basbedo cultivated rice for him in their excellent lowlands.

The district chief had fields both behind his compound and in the bush, which were cultivated for him by his retainers, serfs, and slaves. More than the Mogho Naba and the provincial ministers, the district chief believed that a Moaga must perform agricultural work during the planting season; to show his interest in farming, he often personally supervised the work on his plantations. When the task of weeding or harvesting proved too much for his own people, he asked his villages for a *sosogha*. On that day, each village chief, accompanied by his men, went to the district chief's fields, where, to the accompaniment of drums and chants and with the verbal encouragement of district administrators, the villages vied with each other in their task. The district chief usually sat under a tree and watched the proceedings and occasionally visited the various contingents to observe the progress made. Toward evening, the chief's wives gave the workers large quantities of food and drink in compensation for their services.

Like the Mogho Naba, the district chief had officials who collected taxes on commodities sold in local markets. These district market officials were usually serfs, Gurunsi captives, or bondsmen from other populations. Mossi rarely served in such capacities because many of the local market places were considered ritually dangerous, and their titular deities, the Tengkouga, were believed to wreak vengeance on market officials who were tardy with sacrifices. The local Kos Naba supervised the slaughtering of every animal killed in the market, kept its skin so that its ownership could be verified if necessary, and collected taxes from the butchers in the form of meat or cowries. The Raga Naba of the district was not as strict as his counterpart in Ouagadougou, and seldom imposed formal taxes on the traders. He usually walked around the market, trailed by the chief's servants, and seized calabashes of grain and other commodities, which he placed in the servants' baskets. The Raga Naba did not tax those itinerant traders or caravaneers who visited the markets in the district, nor did he interfere with them in any other way. These merchants usually had business and personal relations with the chief, and he himself handled revenue from this source. The merchants gave him goods from the forest and Sahara regions, and he in turn often gave them wives, who were thus taken out of the district.

The Mossi district chief was always on the lookout for new sources of revenue, and thus welcomed strangers into his district because they "in-

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prepared sauce, and flung them in three directions to the waiting ancestral spirits. He then beseeched the royal spirits, the spirits of former provincial ministers, and the spirits of the ancient people (the Ninisi) to grant a long life to the Mogho Naba and peace to all the Mossi. He repeated the ritual with three morsels of meat and with the contents of a pot of beer. When he had finished, the Gande Naba picked up the food thrown to the ancestors and carried it away. He did not look backward for fear that he should see the ancestors and die as a result. The departure of the Gande Naba was the signal for the palace retainers to rush toward the food. They seized and ate what they could, spilling and wasting a good deal in the process.[8]

Meanwhile, chiefs and headmen held similar ceremonies in every district, village, hamlet, and compound in the Ouagadougou kingdom. District and village chiefs offered sacrifices to their ancestors in the name of their subjects. The sacrifices on the hamlet and compound level were more specific. Every grown man had to take a sheep, goat, or chicken to his elder and request that it be offered to the ancestors in his name. The elder sacrificed the animal and beseeched the ancestors to grant the petitioner good health, bountiful crops, and many children during the coming year. The women and children did not take part in the ritual, but they did participate in the general feasting that followed.

The festivities of the Tense lasted only a few days in the districts and villages, but in the capital it did not end officially until about four weeks had elapsed. At the end of this period, the Larhalle Naba gave the Mogho Naba all the cords that had been used to mark the coming of the Tense. A few days later, the chief Tengsoba of Guillingou, the native village of Oubri's mother, and the Tengsobadamba of other important ceremonial centers, visited the Mogho Naba in the palace courtyard. Here they all sacrificed white cocks and placed the blood and feathers of their victims on their ceremonial axes in order to "increase the power" of these objects. Later on, they were given cooked mutton, millet cakes, and other presents. Their departure for home later in the day marked the close of the Tense.

The religio-political function of the Tense is quite explicit, despite the statement by Dim Delobson, himself a Mossi chief (but also a convert to Catholicism), that "it is apparent that this festival has no outstanding features. Its sole aim is to make peace between the living and the dead, and, in the process, to allow everyone to enjoy the food."[9] Judging by the reports of old men who participated in the festival before it was banned, the people did have a good time and enjoyed the food. What is important, however, is that like the Basgha, the Tense served not only "to make peace

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administration, and failed to serve as an administrative training ground for either the Mossi ministers or the commoner representatives.[88]

During the Hesling period, the Mossi district chiefs remained in power, but the French, through their African administrative assistants, kept a stricter watch on district affairs. The chiefs regained some of their judicial (or, rather, conciliatory) power in 1921 when the Governor, dissatisfied with the territory's legal system, promulgated a decree reorganizing the courts and giving the Mossi district and village chiefs the right of adjudication in minor cases involving civil and commercial matters.[89] However, they had to send all cases involving serious crimes and all appeals from other cases to higher courts. Because their subjects could appeal to the subdivision courts and because they risked reprimand by administrators when their verdicts were deemed unjust, many Mossi chiefs complied. They tried to do so even when the litigants themselves would have preferred not to deal with the administrators. Often the chiefs overtly told the litigants to go to the administrators but covertly persuaded them not to do so. In this manner they observed all proprieties toward both the French and their subjects.

The village and district courts had to send all criminal offenses such as assault and battery cases and major thefts, as well as appeals against their verdicts, to a "tribunal of the first degree," which was presided over by a subdivision commander and his Mossi assessors. Cases were taken to the tribunal only when the dispute was extremely serious or when people were gravely injured, because Mossi villagers hesitated to take their cases to officials who, when not swamped with work, had little patience with the complexities of Mossi litigation. Moreover, the Mossi feared to subject their fellows to the rigors of the Indigénat, which was still in existence, because, as one official source declares, "If this regime subsists, it is because the Voltaic populations have not yet reached a level of development that would permit the withdrawal of a weapon which is so readily useful to the commanders of administrative units. Besides, when judiciously managed, it does not present any danger in these undeveloped regions."

Cases which the subdivision commanders considered too serious for their courts were sent to "tribunals of the second degree" at the cercle level. From there, cases were sent to a "colonial court of appeal," which was presided over by the Chief Officer of Political Affairs of the territory and which could sentence a criminal to three to ten years in prison. More serious crimes carrying longer prison terms or the death penalty were sent up to the Supreme Court at Dakar. Owing in part to the lack of communication between the rural districts and the higher courts, the Mossi

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were seldom able to follow a case higher than the subdivision level. In cases involving long imprisonment or the death penalty, the relatives of the condemned person usually learned about the sentence through rumors from the capital, but seldom through the administration.

One judicial duty which the administration gave the Mossi chiefs and which they had always disliked was the adjudication of domestic cases. They found such cases even more difficult and distasteful after Hesling issued a circular on "The Condition of the Native Woman," which is summarized in a semi-official report as follows:

> [The Governor] is pained to see [the Mossi woman] so often subjected to a special form of slavery which, notably at the time of marriage, reduces her to the role of a domestic animal. Without wishing to interfere with ingrained native traditions, the Governor desires "to prime the desirable evolution by means of judicial decisions." Thus he comes to the decision that in those lawsuits concerning marriage in which formerly the woman was not consulted, she must henceforth be present and must argue the case with her husband. M. Hesling trusts that this procedural reform, which he hopes will give the native woman "a consciousness of her individuality and her rights," will be followed in the courts by further reforms. First of all [the courts] must weaken and then progressively modify those traditions which promote injustice toward women. . . . Questions will no doubt be raised as to whether it is necessary to set up regulations on such matters. However, M. Hesling advises his administrators to adjust [such regulations] to, and apply them with respect for, ancestral traditions. It will be interesting to see the results obtained in this attempt, and to see whether the "moussos" [a malapropism denoting Mossi women] of the Upper Volta will acquire some individuality.[60]

The Mossi chiefs were not told that the Governor's circular recommending a change in the status of women stipulated that traditional practices be taken into account. But even if they had been told, they would not have been impressed, because any fundamental change in the status of women would have placed their whole society in jeopardy. Woman exchange stood at the core of a social, economic, and political nexus that held Mossi society together. True, in pre-conquest times most quarrels and lawsuits were caused by trouble over women, but the marriage system was upheld by all the other institutions. Even after the arrival of the French and the weakening of the chiefs' judicial role, the Mossi could punish violators of the marriage system by imposing social sanctions. They now feared that if the French passed laws giving the women free choice in marriage, and the chiefs had to adjudicate on the basis of these laws, all traditional sanctions would become obsolete. Neither the chiefs nor the Mossi on the Councils of Native Notables nor the elders welcomed any discussion about

12:Skinner E-4,5 (1955-1957) 1962
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CHAPTER 9

Trade and Markets Among the Mossi People

BY ELLIOTT P. SKINNER

The Mossi represent the dominant population of the Voltaic Republic, numbering about 1,600,000 out of some 3,200,000 inhabitants. They represent the unique example of a group which has preserved its ethnic identity and political autonomy through all the vicissitudes of Sudanic history until it was conquered by the French in 1896. Tradition records that the people who became the Mossi left the Dagomba region in present-day Ghana during the eleventh century and moved into the bend of the Niger River, carving out three large kingdoms and smaller principalities in the process. At the head of these still extant kingdoms are rulers *(Moro Nabas)* who formerly held feudal-like control over the provinces, districts and villages which comprise their domains. The villages, with their patri-local, polygynous, extended family households, formed the basic Mossi settlement pattern. A complex hierarchical administrative apparatus carried the power of the Mossi rulers into the smallest villages, and funneled taxes and tribute back to them. This structure still exists, but of course it has been modified by the French.

The Mossi were and are still divided into stratified royal, noble and commoner patrilineages. Characteristic of this lineage system is a process by which royal sub-lineages descend serially until they merge with the mass of commoner lineages. Below the lineages there once were large non-Mossi groups of serfs and slaves, but these people have now been grouped into lineages and have become Mossicized.

The topography of Mossi country is typical of the Sudanic grasslands. It is an immense plain, some 1,500 feet above sea level and broken only by three low mountain ranges and numerous small hills. The annual total rainfall is between 30 and 40 inches, and falls almost entirely as heavy showers or thundershowers during the period from June to September. So narrow is the margin of rainfall for successful crop cultivation that any variation in the cycle results in low crop yields and a difficult "hungry period" the following year before the new crops are harvested. The Mossi do not practice irrigation, and would have trouble doing so because the three Volta Rivers which drain their territory serve as drainage chiefly during the rainy season. Only the Black Volta has water all year round; the